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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 48th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 8 December at 10.30 a.m.

President: Mr. HUSLID (Norway)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

Tribute to the memory of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President of Côte d'Ivoire

Adoption of the agenda and organizational matters (continued)

Coordination questions (continued)

Committee for Development Planning (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Somavía (Chile), Mr. Huslid (Norway), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF FELIX HOUPHOUËT-BOIGNY, PRESIDENT OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The PRESIDENT paid tribute to the memory of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President of Côte d'Ivoire.

At the invitation of the President, the members of the Council observed a minute of silence.

Mr. MONGBE (Benin), speaking on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States, thanked the President for the expression of sympathy, which he would convey to the people and Government of Côte d'Ivoire.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1993/117)

The PRESIDENT drew attention to the list of items for consideration at the Council's resumed substantive session of 1993, contained in document E/1993/117.

COORDINATION QUESTIONS (continued)

United Nations common system (E/1993/66, E/1993/83, E/1993/119 and Add.1)

The PRESIDENT, drew attention to the relevant document and said it was his understanding that, following informal consultations, it had been agreed that the question should be referred to the General Assembly for consideration at the current session. He therefore suggested that the Council should adopt the following draft decision:

"The Economic and Social Council decides to take note of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled 'Relationship agreements between the United Nations and the specialized agencies: review and strengthening of sections pertaining to the common system of salaries, allowances and conditions of services', contained in document E/1993/119, and the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, contained in document E/1993/119/Add.1, and decides to transmit them to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session for further consideration and also to take note of the note by the Secretariat

(The President)

on the United Nations common system, which is contained in document E/1993/83, and the note by the Secretary-General on relationship agreements between the United Nations and member organizations of the United Nations common system, contained in document E/1993/66."

The draft decision suggested by the President was adopted.

COMMITTEE FOR DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (continued) (E/1993/123; E/1993/L.46 and E/1993/L.47)

The PRESIDENT drew attention to the note by the Secretariat contained in document E/1993/123, in which the Secretary-General had proposed that the twenty-ninth session of the Committee for Development Planning should be held early in 1994 with the same membership as that of its twenty-eighth session. Although the Council had decided that the Committee should be reconvened before the end of 1993, that had not been possible owing to practical difficulties. The dates of 12 to 14 January 1994 had therefore been proposed.

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, expressed concern that the proposal was not in line with the decision taken by the Council in its resolution 1993/81, namely that the twenty-ninth session of the Committee for Development Planning would be held before the end of 1993. Furthermore, he did not consider it appropriate to take a decision on such a matter on the basis of a note by the Secretariat. The Council should issue its own decision, possibly in the form of a resolution, which specified a date or at least a deadline for the convening of the Committee's next session.

The PRESIDENT explained that every effort had been made to comply with resolution 1993/81. However, as the Chairman as well as many members of the Committee would have been unable to attend on the dates originally scheduled, the earliest possible dates in 1994 had been proposed, namely, 12-14 January. He appealed for the understanding of members in that regard.

Mr. PORTOCARERO (Belgium) said he appreciated the concerns of the representative of Colombia. It would make more sense to consider substantive proposals relating to the new body that was to replace the Committee for Development Planning and related transitional arrangements before taking any decision on the convening of the twenty-ninth session of the Committee.

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia) said he understood that it would be impossible for the Committee to meet before the deadline specified in resolution 1993/81.

(Mr. Montoya, Colombia)

Nevertheless, he thought that the Council should follow its own precedent of adopting a resolution or taking a formal decision on the dates of the session, and that it should do so at the current meeting.

The PRESIDENT said that the new dates for the twenty-ninth session of the Committee for Development Planning had been proposed for practical reasons. He took it that the Council wished to approve that proposal.

It was so decided.

Draft resolution E/1993/L.46

The PRESIDENT introduced draft resolution E/1993/L.46, on the establishment of the Group of Experts on Development, and drew attention to document E/1993/L.47, which contained the programme budget implications of the draft resolution. He suggested that a comma and the words "the Commission on Sustainable Development" should be inserted after "Economic and Social Council" in paragraph 5 of the draft resolution for the sake of consistency with paragraph 3.

The rationale for the establishment of the Group of Experts on Development was summarized in the third preambular paragraph of the draft resolution. During consultations on the question, the original concept of a consultative machinery for the Secretary-General had been broadened to make the new body more relevant to other intergovernmental bodies. He urged Members to support the establishment of the Group of Experts and the Group's mandate as outlined in the draft resolution.

Mr. PORTOCARERO (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled that he had stated the Union's position on the matter at the previous meeting. He wondered if the Secretariat could clarify whether the provision for the Committee for Development Planning in the proposed programme budget would be used to finance the activities of the Group of Experts on Development and whether funds would be specifically earmarked for the standing panel on least developed countries. A clear distinction must be made between the work of the new body and that of the High-level Board on Sustainable Development, which advised the Secretary-General. Furthermore, when an intergovernmental body turned to the Group of Experts for advice, it should be up to that body to set the parameters and a deadline for the Group's response.

(Mr. Portocarero, Belgium)

With respect to the composition of the Group, it was necessary to strike a balance among the different fields of expertise if the Group was to accomplish its mandate, and the European Union saw no reason why the members of the Committee for Development Planning should not be absorbed into the new group. The same principle of balance should be taken into account during the biennial review of the Group's composition. Lastly, in view of the decision just taken, the European Union believed that the Council still needed to reconfirm the members of the Committee for Development Planning, as suggested in the note by the Secretariat.

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the draft resolution provided an excellent point of departure. After consultations, the new text was very different from the initial proposal to place the advisory body under the High-level Board on Sustainable Development. However, the Group of 77 had not yet had enough time to review the draft resolution carefully and, given the importance of the issue, proposed that discussion in the Council should be postponed for a day or two in order to give the Group time to complete its review.

Mr. MONGBE (Benin), speaking as Chairman of the Second Committee, said that the proposal by the representative of Colombia would mean that consultations of the Group of 77 on the draft resolution would coincide with meetings of his Committee and that it was impossible to cancel any more of those meetings. He suggested that the Group might consult immediately after the current meeting so that it might give an opinion at the next meeting of the Council, that afternoon.

Mr. MONTOYA (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, agreed to the proposal by the representative of Benin.

Mr. PORTOCARERO (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said he wished to suggest two minor, uncontroversial amendments to the draft resolution which the Group of 77 might wish to consider in the course of its consultations. First, in keeping with the Council's past practice, the phrase "for approval by the Economic and Social Council" should be inserted after the word "nominate" in paragraph 2. Secondly, in view of the new functions and structure of the group, he proposed the addition of a new paragraph which would read: "Requests the Economic and Social Council to review the arrangements

(Mr. Portocarero, Belgium)

decided upon above after a period of two years". He took it that paragraph 5 would be redrafted to incorporate the President's amendment.

Mr. HORIGUCHI (Japan) said that his delegation had no problem with the amendments proposed by the European Union. However, he was concerned at the possible financial implications of the Group of Experts on Development and hoped that the Secretariat could clarify them. In order to obtain the approval of the Fifth Committee and other bodies, it might be advisable to make the draft resolution more specific by replacing the phrase "panels of up to 10 experts each" in paragraph 2 with the phrase "up to five or six panels of less than 10 experts each".

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) drew attention to the statement of programme budget implications (E/1993/L.47) and noted that, since the Group of Experts on Development would basically be a successor to the Committee for Development Planning, its operations could be financed from the provision in the proposed programme budget for that Committee. The cost of the panels would depend not only on their number but also on their size. The Secretariat estimated the number of panels per year at approximately six, or 12 per biennium, but some panels might meet more than once, which made it difficult to estimate cost on the basis of the number of panels. As to the High-level Board on Sustainable Development, it was associated with the Commission on Sustainable Development and thus financed under an entirely separate heading.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), replying to a query from the representative of Belgium, confirmed that the panels would be financed within existing provisions on a first-come-first-served basis, but that the standing panel on the least developed countries would be financed separately so that it would be able to meet when other panels met.

Mr. RAMADAN (Egypt) requested clarification of paragraph 4 of the draft resolution: it was not clear whether the 40 experts would meet together or in four 10-member panels to deal with specific requests. He also wished to know whether individual panels of experts would submit recommendations directly to the requesting bodies or whether the Group of Experts would make its recommendations as a whole.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that each panel, constituted in consultation with the Chairman of the Group of Experts, would submit its reports directly to the requesting intergovernmental body. That procedure would obviate the need to meet together, which would be expensive and probably unnecessary.

The PRESIDENT said that the panels would be independent and sovereign in their work. The new system was intended to reduce costs and provide a practical solution for coping with the many additional tasks imposed on the United Nations.

The request by the representative of Belgium to have the Secretary-General nominate the experts with the approval of the Economic and Social Council was in keeping with the intent of the draft resolution. As working with 40 experts at once would be cumbersome, recommendations would be made in smaller panels in consultation with the chairman of the requesting body.

Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco) asked whether the Group of Experts would replace the Committee for Development Planning before or after the Committee's twenty-ninth session. In addition, he wondered whether the term "balanced representation" in paragraph 2 referred to geographic representation or to representation with regard to levels of economic development, a notion which more accurately reflected the Council's composition.

The PRESIDENT said that establishment of a Group of Experts would require time since it would be necessary to find people with qualifications in a number of fields. When the Secretary-General made his nominations, he would look for expertise in the social, environmental and economic fields while remaining mindful of the need to find experts from various regions of the world. It would not be advisable, however, to limit his choices too much, since the Group of Experts was not a regular intergovernmental body. Acceptance of the proposal by the representative of Belgium to require all the members of the Economic and Social Council to endorse the Secretary-General's nominations would guarantee that both geographic and professional balance had been taken into account.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), replying to the representative of Morocco, said that as the twenty-ninth session of the Committee for Development Planning was

(Mr. Desai)

scheduled for 12-14 January 1994, there would not be time to locate the experts for the new body before the session. It was not reasonable to assume that all people of the level required would be willing to work for the United Nations free of charge. In addition, the need to balance discipline, geography, and gender meant that constitution of the Group of Experts would take at least two to three months.

Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that a more specific definition of the term "balanced representation" was in order. Although Council members understood what was meant by that expression, he could not vouch for its reception in the various capitals of the Group of 77. The Chairman had used the expression "constructive ambiguity", which could pass muster in the Council. However, some countries feared that the Committee for Development Planning would be replaced by a group of experts from a single geographic region and consequently had reservations about the draft resolution.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that his Department would be guided by those concerns. In the 20 years since the Committee for Development Planning had been established, he could recall only one case of problems regarding nominations, even though the Committee's procedures for nominating experts were not more detailed than those suggested for the proposed Group of Experts. He again appealed for flexibility in the matter, which was particularly important in that experts of international standing were being asked to share their experiences and to give advice to the United Nations free of charge.

Mr. PORTOCARERO (Belgium) proposed that the discussion should be continued during informal consultations so that a formal opinion from the Group of 77 could be heard.

Ms. IRISH (Canada) supported the proposal by the representative of Belgium. There was indeed a need for flexibility in the formation of panels to provide technical advice to intergovernmental bodies. Though clarity was desirable, it must not stand in the way of flexibility.

Mr. AMAZIANE (Morocco) drew attention to paragraph 2 of the draft resolution, which referred to a broad range of expertise, and recalled that many members of the Committee for Development were economists. In the light of the importance of that field for the Council's work, he hoped that the Secretary-

(Mr. Amaziane, Morocco)

General would call upon economists of the highest calibre and that the Secretariat had sufficient funds to attract such experts.

The PRESIDENT suggested that, while there was general support for the draft resolution, the Group of 77 should continue consultations after the meeting had risen so that the text could be adopted before the end of the day.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.